

**Trade Unions and Industrial Relations in Post-Communist Nations. A
comparison with established democracies.**

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Summary

Trade unions in post-communist countries lack the power to defend the interests of their members. This statement is rarely contested. I take issue with three of the most prominent explanations for this labor infirmity: the lack of resources, the lack of a coherent program for defending employees against the contradictory interests of capital ('labor agenda'), and the failure to unite the politically most active – and often ideologically left-leaning – employees. The standard argument holds that trade unions from the former communist countries differ from trade unions in established democracies on all three of the above counts. Comparing union movements in post-communist and established democracies I argue that this dichotomy is overdrawn and that, as well as failing in their role as vanguard of the politically most active employees, Western trade unions also often lack both resources and a labor agenda. Hence the weakness of Eastern trade unions compared to Western trade unions may be due to other reasons, such as the historical decision to give unions a major role in a coordinated market economy, which is based on the logic of mutual recognition and negotiation.

I Introduction

Trade unions in post communist countries are not very effective in reaching their goals. According to data published by EIRO (European Industrial Relations Observatory on-line 2002/7), collective bargaining coverage in the established democracies is between 60 and 100% of all jobs, while in post-communist countries it is between 10 and 48%. There are only two exceptions: Slovenia has a coverage of 100%, and in the UK 36% of jobs are covered by collective agreements, similar to the figure of Hungary or Poland¹.

This finding of low union efficacy is hardly contested in the comparative analyses of labor relations in Central Eastern Europe and the successor states to the Soviet Union (Thirkell, Petkov, and Vickerstaff 1998; Crowley 2004; Crowley and Ost 2001b; Kubicek 2004).

The literature points to three characteristics that plausibly explain the weakness or are at least correlated with this weakness.

The first explanation is that unions are weak because they lack resources. In this regard low and rapidly declining union density is of utmost importance. The second explanation argues that trade unions lack a labor agenda (Kubicek 2004: 45). They are in a schizophrenic situation. They have to support the establishment of capitalist market relations. At the same time they have to defend employees against the logics of capitalism. They fail to develop a coherent program of collective interest representation against the antithetical interests of capital. The third explanation is that trade unions are not political movements which mobilize members for democratic politics (and they do not act as important elements of a civil society). Rather, they are haunted by the legacies of their role in the former state-socialist systems, and are thus often considered to be 'rearguard institutions for the weak, relevant chiefly for obsolescent state-sectors, rather than vital representatives of labor against capital, let alone agents of expanded citizenship' (Crowley and Ost 2001a: 230).

Explicitly or implicitly, the standard against which trade unions in post-communist countries are judged is the trade union movement in the established democracies of the capitalist nations. It is argued that these western labor movements are in crisis as well. They

¹ EIRO presents data for 13 established democracies and for the eight post-communist nations that joined EU in May 2005.

are losing both members and power. One of the important underlying reasons is globalization, which is hitting the West and the East similarly. The Western unions are however still in a much better position compared to trade unions in post-communist countries.

These far-reaching claims on the infirmity of post-communist labor are based on excellent qualitative studies. By their very nature they have to be restricted to a few, selected countries. There are few attempts to compare a large number of these post-communist labor movements with each other and with labor movements in established democracies.

To what extent are these post-communist unions generally much weaker in terms of resources, in terms of a labor agenda, and in terms of democratic political movements when compared to the western trade union movement?

This is the guiding question of this paper. In contrast to most literature about post-communist labor I try to include a maximum number of countries, by re-analyzing comparative data sets and by looking at selected indicators of resources, labor agenda and political movements.

My basic argument is that the sharp difference between west and east is exaggerated on two counts. (1) There is both in the post-communist world and in the established democracies huge within-group variation that is often as strong as the variation between these two country groups. There is no such thing as a fairly homogeneous Western trade union movement as compared to a homogenous Eastern trade union movement. (2) Membership in trade unions does not make much difference with regard to the support of the labor agenda or with regard to democratic political mobilization. Employees within and outside trade unions are very similar in these respects. This applies to established and post-communist democracies.

II Terms and hypotheses

Trade unions are organized expressions of 'old' social movements. They are organizations based on voluntary membership. Members are the most important resources of unions because they determine the monetary resources and the share of the employees that can be mobilized for economic or political reasons. The membership structure resembles the structure of the whole group of employees with some overrepresentation of male employees with lower-to-medium qualification and with some overrepresentation of public sector workers.

Rights are another resource of utmost importance. Usually these rights are formalized in collective labor law and constitutions. In the perspective of resources, unions are stronger the more members they have and the more their strategies are supported by rules. Examples are stipulations forcing employers to bargain with trade unions or statutory representation of employees on the firm level. Rights are crucial preconditions for collective interest representation. But under unfavorable circumstances (e.g. high unemployment) or lacking support of union members (e.g. strike averse members), rights such as the right to strike do not give necessarily much power.

Trade unions are organizations that represent collective interests. They lobby employers (and often the state as well) for better working conditions. Employees who join trade unions are assumed to share the idea that their collective interests have to be defended against the interests of the employers. This does not exclude individual interests, such as an interest in specific union services, e.g. support in individual conflicts at the workplace. Nonetheless, the idea of collective interests is of utmost importance not only in the history and in the programs of the western labor movements, but also in their collective labor conflicts. As argued by Marx and Engels, by organizing in labor unions, employees suspend the competition between them in order to compete with capital. Employees unite in unions because under conditions of free markets they are individually weaker than employers. Therefore compared to their fellow workers trade unionists tend to be more skeptical of the unlimited rule of markets and tend to stress ideas of solidarity, of equality and of common interests which often are contradictory to the interests of employers. This has been labeled the 'labor agenda' (Kubicek 2004: 45).

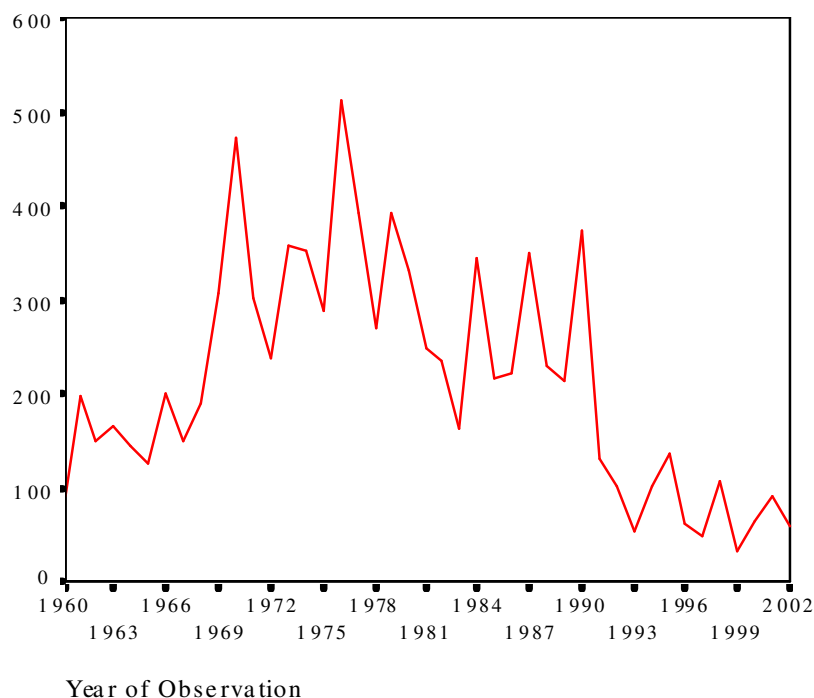
In historical perspective and by the very nature of an interest organization, unions are political movements. In a Tocquevillian view, unions socialize employees politically. (Tocqueville 1961: 158). This point has been emphasized in the recent debates on 'social capital' (Putnam 2000) and in empirical analyses of favorable conditions of democratic political participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Other authors have less trust in the capabilities of collective organizations with regard to political socialization. Organizations do not educate active democrats, they argue. They argue instead that interest organizations attract the politically interested and active part of the population (Newton 1997). The base line is however, that politically interested and active citizens are overrepresented in trade unions, be it because of the socializing effects or of the self-selectivity that tends to attract active democrats.

With regard to ideas of solidarity, equality and the skepticism towards markets as well as with regard to democratic political activity, unions in the West are assumed to be vanguards of all employees.

According to the thesis of labor infirmity in the post-communist countries, unions have few and ever decreasing resources, they have no labor agenda and they are not organizations of active democrats. Union density is low and rapidly declining; unions are basically unions of the public sector whilst unionism in the private sector hardly exists. In the established democracies however, unions do still have a labor agenda and are still organizations of active democrats. There are some similarities, though. Unions in the established democracies are also exposed to the unfavorable conditions of globalizations and are also losing members (Kubicek 1999; Kubicek 2004). But given these similarities Western trade unions start from a much better position in terms of resources.

These are heroic assumptions, though. Trade unions in the West have changed considerably during the last quarter century. One obvious example is industrial conflict. Although unions are still able to mobilize large numbers of employees – see the recent strike waves in Germany, Italy and France – , the trend in strikes is down (Graph 1) in the West. Since the mid 1990s it is now consistently below the level that existed before the surge of industrial militancy that happened in the late 1960s. Although strike volume is not an indicator of union strength, the decline of strike activity points to problems in using the strike weapon as a normal means of collective bargaining or as ultima ratio in conflicts between capital and labor.

Graph 1: Strike activity (working days lost by 1'000 employees) in established OECD-democracies, 1960-2002



Source: Armingeon et al. 2005

Note: Average of nation strike volume. Countries: EU-15 plus Iceland, Norway, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan. Missing data for Belgium 1981-1987, 1999-2001; France 1968; Greece 1960-1977, 1999-2001; Iceland 1960-1969; Japan 2000; Luxembourg 1960-1985, 1994-2001; Portugal 1960-1978; Spain 1960-1969.

Finally there may be some doubts as to whether members still support the previous labor agenda. The recent wave of demonstrations against welfare state retrenchment in several European countries makes clear that employees are concerned about the risks of a market economy. But this does not necessarily imply that they still stick to a program of solidarity and equality. This may have lost its appeal with the decline of state socialism and the developments of ‘third ways’ in the West. Finally with the changing modes of political participation, trade unions may have lost their prominent role in organizing participation. Trade unions may cease to make a difference in participation because groups outside the trade union movement increasingly copy many of their traditional means, such as demonstrations, signing petitions, and strikes (Dalton 2005).

In addition, the comparison of post-communist labor movements with trade unions in the established democracies suffers from the well-known huge variations in both country-

groups. The underlying assumption, that the within-group variation is still much smaller than the between-group variation needs to be proven, though.

Taking into account the major changes of society and politics during the last quarter of a century, I posit that trade union membership does not make a large difference in regards to support for a labor agenda and participation in democratic politics.

In both cases, labor unions are neither vanguards (established democracies) nor rearguards (post-communist countries) of the employees. They are just representative for all employees, be they in- or outside of the labor organizations. If there is a difference between union movements in old and post-communist democracies is not an effect of different logics and structures of trade union movements, but of a different labor force and its attitudes and behaviors.

III Data, operationalizations and research design

In this paper I wish to make two contributions: First, I try to make a comparative analysis including as many nations as possible from the post-communist world and the world of established democracies. Second, I will use large datasets with comparable data. The main sources are representative surveys, conducted between 1999 and 2004 and covering many nations.

These surveys are underused for the comparative analysis of the labor movements in these countries, although they offer certain advantages both for data on size and structure of union memberships and for the extend of support of a labor agenda or support of democratic idea. For example it is often argued that membership figures for post-communist trade unions are inaccurate because union officials do not possess good data and thus tend to inflate these figures or because they overstate union densities by counting also retired members. In these cases figures from representative surveys which directly ask employees about membership may be more accurate. Likewise the support for collective interest representation is often erroneously inferred from behavioral data such as strike behavior. This is dependent on many other variables, such as economic circumstances or employers' willingness or capability to make concessions though. It is not a very reliable indicator of 'class consciousness'. Attitudinal data for questions regarding solidarity or equality give better information although they do not indicate actual behavior but attitudes and claims about behavior. Similarly, the capability of unions to mobilize members will be better indicated by statements regarding

willingness to participate in various forms of political action, rather than by interpretation of singular events such as a demonstration in some parts of the nations.

My study rests on four major surveys. The World Values Survey of 1999-2001 (Inglehart 2004) comprises data from nations in the established democracies and in the post-communist countries². The major drawback of this data set is the lack of information on employment in the public and private sector. In addition there are some questions about the quality of the data. Therefore I included the 1999 (Inequality) ISSP (International Social Survey Program). It has data on public and private sector employment³, and hence allows for the analysis of the structure of union membership. Finally I used the European Social Surveys of 2002 and 2004/05 in order to check the robustness of the findings from the WVS⁴. The ISSP and ESS survey have been weighted to correct for design effects. The WVS has not been weighted since the available weight has not been calculated in the same ways for all countries.

In all surveys I analyzed only employees, since I am interested in the behavioral and attitudinal differences between trade union members and employees who have not joined labor unions⁵.

For resources I created three statistics:

(a) union density, i.e. the share of employed union member in the dependent labor force.

² 18 established democracies: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Great Britain and the US.) 14 post-communist countries: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Belarus, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Rumania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, Macedonia.

³ 13 established democracies: Germany (West), Great Britain, USA, Austria, Norway, Sweden, New Zealand, Canada, Israel, Japan, France, Cyprus, Portugal. 9 post-communist nations: Germany (East), Hungary, Czech republic, Slovenia, Poland, Bulgaria, Russia, Latvia, Slovakia

⁴ ESS 2002: 17 established democracies: Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden. 4 post-communist countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia.

ESS 2004: 12 established democracies: Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, Spain, Finland, Great Britain, Greece, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Sweden. 4 post-communist nations: Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Slovenia. The day I finished this paper a new version of ESS 2004 with three additional post-communist nations became available. These data could not be included in this version of the paper.

⁵ In ISSP 1999 and ESS 2002 and 2004/4 I excluded the unemployed; in WVS 1999-2001 they are included.

(b) structure and organisational activity of the union membership. The structure has been summarized by regressing age, gender, education and employment in the public⁶ or private sector on the likelihood of union membership. Simplifying the presentation of results of this logistic regression analysis I will report only coefficients that are significant at the .05 level. This analysis will show to what extent the likelihood of being a trade union member is determined by public sector employment. The data on organizational activity is an additive index (means over three questions) for trade union members. These members have been asked whether in the last 12 months they have participated in union affairs, have donated money for the unions or have done voluntary work for the unions. The relevant statistics runs from 0 (nothing) to 1 (all types of activity, for which data are available, have been done). This information helps to clarify the claim that unions in post-communist nations fail to mobilize members for work in the organization.

(c) rights. For this variable I used a data base constructed by Rafael de la Porta et al (this dataset has been used for (La Porta et al. 2004) pertaining to the period around 2000. This index measures the level of protection of industrial (collective) relations laws. The index is computed as the normalized sum of: (i) subindex of collective bargaining; (ii) subindex of worker participation in management; (iii) subindex of collective disputes. Re-running the analyses for the various sub-indices did not lead to a change of conclusions.

For the support of a 'labor agenda' I calculated various indicators. They pertain to the questions;

whether it is fair if two secretaries doing the same job are paid the same wages, although one is more efficient and reliable than the other⁷ (1 not fair, 0 fair)(WVS)

whether incomes should be made more equal (1) or whether we need larger income differences as incentives for individual effort (10) (WVS)

whether the government should take measures to reduce differences in income (1 strongly agree, 5 strongly disagree) (ESS 2002, ESS 2004/5)

whether private or government ownership of business and industry should be increased (1: private, 10: government) (WVS)

⁶ Including private non-profit organizations.

⁷ 'Imaging two secretaries, of the same age, doing practically the same job. One finds out that the other earns considerably more than she does. The better paid secretary, however, is quicker, more efficient and more reliable at her job. In your opinion, is it fair or not fair that one secretary is paid more than the other'

whether government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for or whether people should take more responsibility to provide for themselves (people should take responsibility: 1; govt should take responsibility: 10)(WVS)

whether competition is good. It stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas 1); or whether competition is harmful. It brings out the worst in people (10) (WVS).

Whether the state should give more freedom to firms (1) or whether it should control firms more efficiently (10) (WVS)

Whether the less governments intervenes into the economy, the better it is for the country (1: strongly agree, 5: strongly disagree)(ESS 2002)

Whether there are very strong (1), strong, not very strong or no conflicts (respectively the respondent could not chose) (4) between management and workers (ISSP 1999).

All these questions tap different aspects of the traditional western 'labor agenda': income equality, unlimited rule of markets, private and public ownership or control of firms, recognition of a structural conflict between capital and labor.

Finally I collected data for the aspect of trade unions as political movements which unite the politically most active democrats among the employees. This was measured by the following questions:

Whether the respondent is very (1), somewhat, not very or not at all interested in politics (4) (WVS, ESSP 2002, "004/5)

How often the respondent follows politics in the news on television or on the radio or in the daily papers (from 1=every day to 5=never) (WVS)

Where the respondents locates him/herself politically on a scale running from left (1) to right (10) (WVS, ESS 2004/5)

Whether it is good (1) or bad (4) to have a democracy (WVS)

Whether the respondent voted at the last national election (ESS 2002, 2004/5)

Whether the respondent feels close to a political party (ESS 2002, 2004/5)

Whether the respondent has already participated or may participate in weakly or non-institutionalized forms of political participation such as signing a petition, joining in boycotts, attending lawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes or occupying buildings or factories (additive index based on available answers from 0 (none) to 1 (have done all); WVS)

Whether the respondent has been politically active during the last 12 months by contacting a politician, by working in a political party or another organization, by wearing a campaign badge, by signing a petition, by taking part in a lawful demonstration, by boycotting certain products, by donating money to political organizations, and by

participating in illegal protests (additive index based on available answers from 0 (none) to 1 (have done all); ESS 2002, ESS 2004/5).

I regressed these variables of support for the labor agenda and political activity onto a dummy variable of union membership country by country. Since attitudes and political behavior are also highly dependent on socio-economic contexts, I controlled for effects of age, years of education and gender.

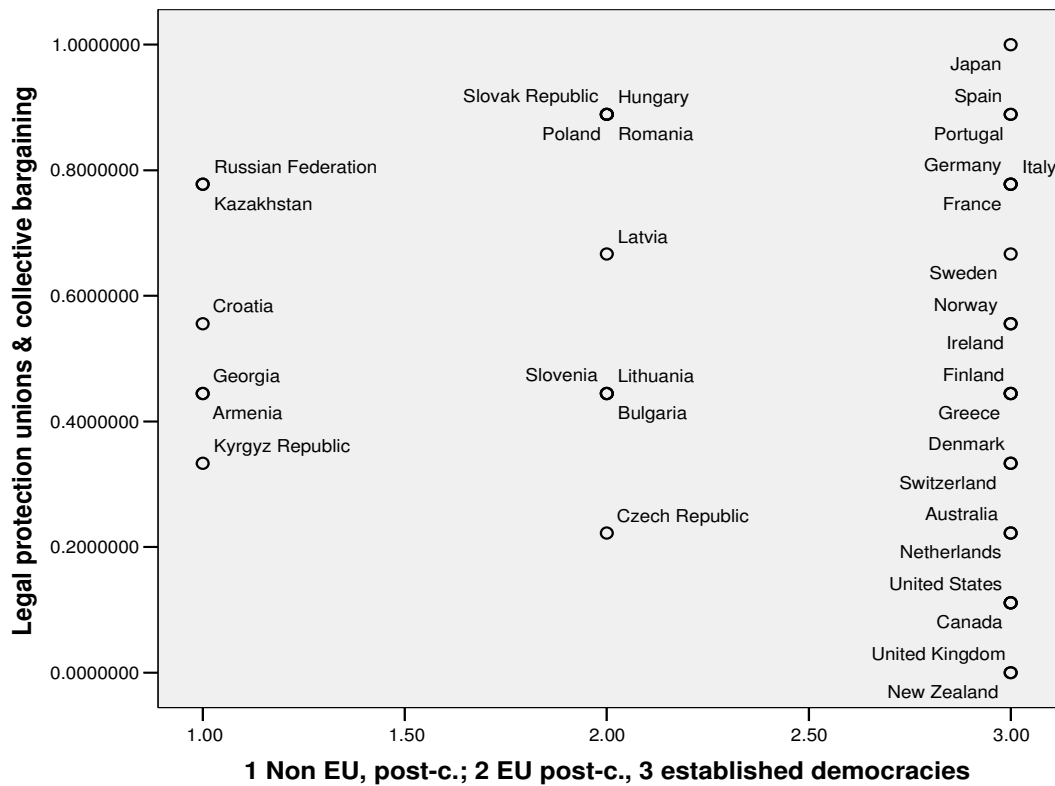
In order to facilitate the oversight over the results, I sometimes display results by three subgroups: (a) Established democracies (ED); (b) those post-communist countries, that have joined the EU and the two nations (Bulgaria, Romania) that will join in all likelihood in the next two years (PC-EU), (c) the remaining post-communist nations (PC-Non-EU).

Simplifying the presentation of these regression analyses I consider only the coefficient for trade union membership. The central question is, whether it is in the expected direction and whether it is significant ($p < .05$). If both criteria are met, trade unionists can be considered a vanguard of the employees in terms of support of the labor agenda and in terms of democratic political activity. From the standard argument, we expect this to be the case in the established democracies but not in the post-communist countries.

IV Ressources

The low efficacy of trade unions in post-communist countries in collective bargaining cannot be explained by a lack of legal resources for collective bargaining. Rather collective bargaining by unions in post- communist countries is to a similar extent protected by statutory rules, as it is the case in the west. This protection is strongest in the Mediterranean countries, and weakest in the Anglo-Saxon democracies. The level of protection of collective bargaining in the post-communist nations corresponds to that of the Continental nations.

Graph 2: Collective bargaining rights



Source: La Porta et al. 2004

The literature on the weakness of post-communist unions argues that unions lack members, and in particular, that membership is declining rapidly. From the data presented in table 1 it is hard to conclude –given the confidence intervals due to survey data – that this rapid decline continued in the first years after the turn of the century. These data support the view though, that the level of union density in the post-communist countries – and in particular in the new EU member states - is in the same range as in the continental European countries.

Table 1: Structure of union membership

Countries	Age	Edu	Gender	Publ. Sect.
<i>Established Democracies:</i>				
Australia	-	-	.57	4.47
Austria	1.03	.93	.44	5.79
Canada	-	-	-	4.77
France	1.04	-	.52	3.13
GB	-	-	.52	3.22
W-Germany	-	.91	.57	2.14
E-Germany	-	-	.54	2.17
Japan	.97	-	-	3.4
Norway	1.01	1.06	-	4.56
NZ	-	-	-	4.32
Portugal	1.03	-	-	3.6
Sweden	1.01	-	-	2.36
USA	-	-	-	-
<i>Post-communist nations:</i>				
Bulgaria	-	-	-	6.52
Czech Rep.	1.025	-	.64	1.61
Hungary	-	-	-	2.11
Latvia	1.03	-	1.64	11.97
Poland	1.03	.97	-	4.86
Slovakia	1.04	-	-	2.7
Slovenia	.97	.98	-	2.35

Source: ISSP 1999

One could argue that membership carries different meanings in West and East. In the West membership has historically been dependent on various forms of voluntary participation of members. In the East, organizations have historically performed functions of state and firm bureaucracies. For example they delivered services such as the distribution of holiday flats in vacation resorts to their members. Hence in the West the level of activity within trade unions should be much higher than in the East. This does not apply though. Rather, activity in unions is not lower in the three post-communist countries for which data are available from the ESS 2002. The mean is even higher than in the 15 Western countries. This difference of means is significant at the $p=.064$.

Table 2: Union Densities

Countries	WVS 99-01	ISSP 1999	ESS 2002	ESS 2004
<i>Established Democracies:</i>				
Australia	-	38	-	-
Austria	27	-	35	30
Belgium	25	-	43	49
Canada	20	27	-	-
Denmark	72	-	85	83
France	6	21	13	-
Finland	47	-	78	75
GB	9	-	-	-
Germany	11	-	22	18
E-Germany	-	21	-	-
W-Germany	-	24	-	-
Greece	11	-	22	20
Iceland	71	-	-	-
Ireland	18	-	40	-
Italy	9	-	28	-
Japan	11	30	-	-
Luxembourg	14	-	42	46
Netherlands	28	-	29	-
Norway	-	56	60	62
NZ	-	26	-	-
Portugal	5	20	17	17
Spain	7	-	19	14
Sweden	73	79	78	82
Switzerland	-	-	18	17
UK	-	25	30	26
USA	14	16	-	-
<i>Post-communist nations that join(ed) the EU:</i>				
Bulgaria	12	26	-	-
Czech. Rep.	15	29	22	14
Estonia	07	-	-	10
Hungary	11	27	19	-
Latvia	18	26	-	-
Lithuania	3	-	-	-
Poland	17	19	21	18
Romania	20	-	-	-
Slovakia	21	32	-	-
Slovenia	27	36	49	45
<i>Post-communist nations not in EU:</i>				
Albania	14	-	-	-
Belarus	51	-	-	-
Bosn.Herz.	10	-	-	-
Croatia	19	-	-	-
Macedonia	8	-	-	-
Moldova	21	-	-	-
Russia	35	54	-	-
Ukraine	30	-	-	-

Note: union density is union members in percentage of employees. Weighted data in case of ISSP and ESS. Unweighted in case of WVS. ISSP and ESS relates only to dependent civilian employment; WVS relates to dependent civilian labor force.

Therefore compared to the established democracies the weakness of trade unions of post-communist countries can be attributed neither to a lack of statutory protection, nor to a lack of members nor to a lack of active members. One important argument adds that one of the reasons for the weakness of post-communist unions is their concentration in the public sector. The likelihood of an employee in the private sector becoming a union member is low. This is true in post-communist nations; but it is also true for established democracies. The exponent beta indicates to what extent the odds of being a union member are changed if an employee works in the public sector. (Table 2).

The likelihood of becoming a union member for a public employee in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland, and Slovakia is similar to that in most established democracies. Bulgaria and Russia resemble the extreme Western case of Austria, and only Latvia is set apart from all Western countries. The crucial difference is obviously that the private sector is on average much smaller in the post-communist countries. Hence the share of members from the public sector is larger because of the size of the public sector and not because of a higher likelihood of membership of these public sector employees compared to the established democracies.

Summarizing, the difference between union resources in established democracies and post-communist nations is much smaller than the argument of infirmity of post-communist union movement suggests.

V Support for the labor agenda

In the previous section I showed that the differences in resources between union movements are much smaller than the dichotomy of infirmity in the East compared to moderately strong union movements in the West suggest. This does not invalidate the argument that unions and their members in the West tend to be a vanguard of the employees in terms of supporting goals such as wage equality, democratic control of markets, or acceptance of a high level of conflict between labor and capital. In contrast, union members in the East tend to be the rearguard of the working class. They do not support a labor agenda any more so than do the other employees.

This dichotomy is not true though. Table 3 depicts the results of the regression analyses. Column 1 indicates the survey and the year of the survey. The second column gives a shorthand description of the variables (see for operationalizations above). Column 3 divides

cases between the established democracies and the post-communist nation. For each of the labor movements in these nations, the respective dependent variable has been regressed onto the variable trade union membership and three standard controls (age, gender, years of education). The crucial question has been whether union membership makes a significant difference with regard to these independent variables. If the coefficient of union membership was significant and in the expected direction, this national union movement has been classified as in support of a labor agenda. Column 4 shows the percentage of countries in the respective country group for which this was the case. Column 5 contains the acronyms of these nations. The last column indicates for how many countries regression analyses has been run. This is dependent on the survey. In addition, in some international surveys some of the questions have not been posed in all national surveys. This explains the variation of the numbers in column 5.

Table 3: Support of the labor agenda

Survey	Variable	Country group	% of national union movements supporting labor agenda	National labor movements supporting labor agenda	No. of nations
WVS	Wage equality (secretary)	Establ. Democ.	10	NL, UK	21
		Post-comm.	11	Moldov., Mace	18
WVS	Public Ownership	Establ. Democ.	29	AT, F, It, USA	14
		Post-comm.	8	Russia	13
WVS	Competition	Establ. Democ.	26	Be, NL, Can, Sw, USA	19
		Post-comm.	6	Lativa	17
WVS	State control	Establ. Democ.	38	Be, Ire, It, NL, Esp, Sw,	16
		Post-comm.	14	Latvia, Slovenia	14
WVS	More income equality	Establ. Democ.	7	NL	13
		Post-comm.	0	-	14
WVS	Govt responsibility	Establ. Democ.	32	Be, F, Gre, NL, Esp, Sw	19
		Post-comm.	0		18
ESS 2002	Govt ec. intervention	Establ. Democ.	29	CH, Esp, F, No, Sw	17
		Post-comm.	25	Cz	4
ESS 2002	Govt should decrease inequality	Establ. Democ.	41	Be, CH, Finl, UK, Lux, No, Sw	17
		Post-comm.	50	Pol, Slovenia	4
ESS 2004	Govt should decrease inequality	Establ. Democ.	31	Be, CH, No, Sw	13
		Post-comm.	0		4
ISSP 1999	Lots of conflicts management worker	Establ. Democ.	0		10
		Post-comm.	13	Cz	8

The first entries in table 3 can be interpreted in the following way: The question under study is whether it is fair to pay two secretaries different salaries when both have the same job, but one is more effective. We expect traditional union member to insist on equal wage for equal jobs, even if performance varies. This question has been posed in 21 nations in the group of established democracies and in 18 post-communist countries. In only two countries (10% of all 21 countries) in the West, namely the Netherlands and the UK, trade unionists are significantly different from non-organized employees with regard to this question. In the post-communist world there are also two national labor movements with a significant difference between unionist and non-unionized workers. This is the case of Moldova and Macedonia, i.e. in 11% of all post-communist countries (18 nations) analyzed.

Table 3 shows that in only a minority of cases do the trade unionists in post-communist countries support a strong labor agenda. This applies not only to aspects of the agenda that are at the core of the Western labor movement such as skepticism against markets and wage inequality. It also applies to aspects of the labor agenda that are more likely to be supported if the Eastern unions were rearguards, representing the ideals of the former state socialism. In most cases public ownership of firms or strong state control of the economy are not more strongly supported by trade unionist than by their fellow non-unionized employees.

Table 3 shows also that the feeble support for the labor agenda is not restricted to the East. In contrast to many statements by union officials and in contrast to explicit or implicit assumptions of much of the literature on Western trade unions, the labor agenda is only weakly supported by trade unionists (compared to non-unionized workers) in the established democracies as well. It is true that in comparison to the post-communist world Western trade unions come closer to the model of trade unions as the vanguard of the employees. But there are more national labor movements that do not support the traditional union ideas than there are national movements that do.

The upshot of this analysis is that trade union members are not – or not any longer – the vanguard of the employees with regard to the support of traditional union ideas. In general this applies both to the East and the West. And therefore the low effectiveness of Eastern trade unionism cannot be explained by the weak support of the labor agenda.

VI Labor unions as vanguards of active (left) democrats.

Even if Eastern trade unions do not have much less resources and if they support the labor agenda as weakly as their Western counterparts do, there may still be a major difference between union movements in both country groups. In the West, trade unions are social movements that have political goals. In most cases these goals have been linked to the ideas of the communist, the social democratic or the Christian-social political parties. In addition trade unions are one of the major strongholds of democracy. This is, at least, what union officials tell and what figures prominently in the literature on social capital. In contrast, in the post-communist nations union do not have these functions. Critics argue that they are the rearguard of the working class, often having an interest in or some sympathy for the old undemocratic system.

Table 4 contains the analysis of the various indicators of attitudes of active (and left) democrats. It is organized and can be interpreted in the same way as table 3. The results for the post-communist nations (and further statistics, not displayed here) make clear that union members do not constitute a political rearguard in the sense that they more skeptical and alienated from democratic values than the other employees. Rather they are not very different from the non-unionized employees in their political attitudes and behavior. There is some evidence that they are more active democrats than non-unionists. Comparing the results with the support of the labor agenda, generally more union movements correspond to the ideal of strongholds of democracies than to the ideal of representatives of the labor agenda. However, the data are far away from the expectations created by proponents of ‘civil society’ or social capital. This literature suggests that generally members of voluntary associations (such as trade unions) are more active and politically interested supporters of democracy. This is not true. In some, but generally not even in most of the nations under study union members are different from non-unionized employees in their pro-democratic attitudes and behavior.

In the established democracies the results are more in support of the ‘social capital’ thesis with regard to all but one indicator. However, even in the established democracies, trade union are not or not any longer organizations of the politically most active and interested segments of the working class. Very often, national labor movements consist of members that are as politically active as non-unionized workers.

The argument about labor infirmity in post-communist nations points to lacking characteristics of a democratic political union movement. The implicit assumption is that in

established democracies labor unions are political movements that gain strength from the attitudinal foundations of coalitions of the unions with political parties and the capability to mobilize members because they have a higher likelihood and a track record of political activity. In these stark terms this does not apply, or does not apply any longer, though. With regard to a larger number of indicators most western union movements have members that are not different from employed non-union members in the sense that they are the vanguard of active and left democrats.

Table 4: Labor unions as vanguard of active (left) democrats

Survey	Variable	Country group	% of national union movements being vanguards of (left) active democrats	National labor movements being vanguards of (left) active democrats	No of nations
WVS	Interest in politics	Establ. Democ.	67	AT, Be, Can, F, Ger, Gre, Ire, It, Lux, NL, Esp, UK	18
		Post-comm.	17	Rus, Mac	12
WVS	How often follow politics	Establ. Democ.	47	AT, Can, Fin, Ger, Gre, It, Por, Esp, UK	19
		Post-comm.	32	Bul, Rom, Slovakia, Mold, Russ	19
WVS	Left-Right Scale	Establ. Democ.	52	Be, Fin, Ger, Gre, It, Jap, NL, Port, Esp, Sw	19
		Post-comm.	11	Czech, Ukraine	18
WVS	Good to have a democracy	Establ. Democ.	16	Ger, Swe, UK	19
		Post-comm.	6	Mold	18
WVS	Political action	Establ. Democ.	84	AT, Be, Can, Dk, F, Ger, Gre, Ice, Ire, It, Jap, Lux, NL, Esp, Sw, USA	19
		Post-comm.	50	Bul, Lat, Pol, Rom, Slovakia, Croa, Mold, Rus, Mac	18
ESS 2002	Interest in politics	Establ. Democ.	47	CH, Ger, Esp, F, Gre, Ire, Lux, NL	17
		Post-comm.	25	Hu	4
ESS 2002	Political action	Establ. Democ.	65	AT, CH, Ger, Esp, F, UK, Gre, It, Lux, NL, Por	17
		Post-comm.	0		4
ESS 2002	Voted last election	Establ. Democ.	41	Be, CH, Esp, UK, Ire, Por, Sw	17
		Post-comm.	0		4
ESS 2002	Close to a political party	Establ. Democ.	29	AT, CH, Ger, F, It	17
		Post-comm.	25	Cz	4
ESS 2004	Political action	Establ. Democ.	71	AT, CH, Ger, Esp, Gre, Lux, Nor, Por, Sw	14
		Post-comm.	25	Poland	4
ESS 2004	Voted last election	Establ. Democ.	31	AT, UK, Lux, Por	13
		Post-comm.	25	Czech	4

ESS 2004	Close to a political party	Establ. Democ.	33	CH, Esp, Lux, Nor	12
		Post-comm.	50	Pol, Slovenia	4
ESS 2004	Left-Right Scale	Establ. Democ.	42	CH, Fin, UK, Nor, Sw	12
		Post-comm.	0		4

VII Conclusions

Trade unions in post-communist nations have little power. They are not very effective in realizing the economic and political goals of their members. This finding is rarely contested in the literature. There are many explanations for this labor infirmity. One prominent answer points to lack of resources. Another holds that trade unions do not have a labor agenda in the sense of a number of economic goals and strategies that are in conflict with those of management. And finally it is argued that in the West trade unions are a vanguard of active democrats with clear ideology whilst in the post-communist nations trade union member are not such a vanguard. They may even be a rearguard preserving the ideologies of the undemocratic past.

In this paper I probed into these arguments by re-analysing large data sets and comparing the results to those from established democracies. I showed that in terms of resources post-communist labor movements are similar to Continental-European and Anglo-Saxon movements. It is true, that the post-communist labor movements lack a labor agenda; but this is also true for many Western unions. Finally, active democrats are overrepresented in union movements in the West and the East, and in the former stronger than in the latter. But this overrepresentation is of a size that does not allow for the speaking of a vanguard.

But is this really a point? What these analyses show is that trade union members are fairly representative of all employees in the respective nations. They are not members of a vanguard but rather ordinary employees. This does not fit into social capital theory. It also does not fit into theories seeing trade unions as organizations that unite employees who are particularly convinced that labor has collective interests that need to be defended against capital. But one could argue that differences between members and non-member do not matter. Rather it is the level of respective attitudes and behavior that makes a difference. In this vein in the West labor union members should be generally more supportive of the labor agenda and the level of democratic activism should be much higher than in the post-communist nations.

In order to test for this hypothesis I asked whether the membership in the group of established democracies and post-communist nations explains the level of support of the labor agenda and the level of democratic activism. This is a problematic procedure since the comparisons of means for attitudinal and behavior data between countries is dependent on contexts. It is much easier to be in favor of the left in countries where the left did not

represent the discredited old regime. Likewise it is easier to support public ownership of the means of production since this has not been a characteristic of a fizzled former economic regime.

However the analysis of the variance of the mean values for the post-communist and the established democracies led to a conclusion very much similar to the general conclusion of this paper: In most cases there are no significant differences between the levels⁸. The variation within the country groups is more important than the difference between the country groups (table 5).

Table 5: Level of support for the labor agenda and level of democratic (left) participation. Difference between postcommunist and established democracies

Survey	Variable	significant difference of means	Level significantly lower in post-communist nations?
<i>Difference of levels of support of labor agenda</i>			
WVS	wage equality (secretary)	0.09	yes
WVS	private/govt ownership	n.s.	no
WVS	Individual or govt responsibility	0.89	yes
WVS	competition is good/harmful	-0.80	yes
WVS	Firms:freedom or state control	0.77	no
WVS	incomes should be more equal	n.s.	no
ESS 2002	Govt intervention economy	n.s.	no
ESS 2002	Govt income difference	n.s.	no
ESS 2004	Govt income difference	n.s.	no
ISSP 1999	Conflicts labor management	n.s.	no
<i>Difference of level of active left democrats</i>			
WVS	Political action	-0.21	yes
WVS	Interest in politics	n.s.	no
WVS	Left-right scale	0.47	yes
WVS	Good having a democracy	0.28	yes
WVS	How often follow politics	n.s.	no
ESS 2002	Interest in politics	n.s.	no
ESS 2002	Political Action	0.11	no
ESS 2002	Voted last election	n.s.	no
ESS 2002	Close to a party	n.s.	no
ESS 2004	Interest in politics	0.25	yes
ESS 2004	Left-right scale	n.s.	no

How then can we explain labor infirmity in the post-communist world? A first solution is to question the premises: There are indeed analyses showing that the labor movement in post-communist countries has some power, at least in national politics. For example Sabina Avdagic (Avdagic 2005) argues that the Czech trade unions have had some success, Kohl and Platzer see rays of hope for a stronger union movement (Kohl and Platzer 2004) and Matthes

⁸ As a heuristic means I used the criteria of $p < .05$ to decide whether the differences between the two groups of my population is important.

(Matthes 2004) argues that Hungarian unions have played a crucial part in the pension reforms. But besides Slovenia, the comparable quantitative figures for efficacy in collective bargaining - such as collective bargaining coverage - demonstrate a clear difference between the post-communist countries and established democracies. Among the latter, it are in particular the Scandinavian and Continental-European movements that show efficacy in defending the interests of workers.

Resources explain some of the variance. The high union density in Scandinavia is a case in point. But this does not explain trade union influence in countries such as the Netherlands, France, Germany or Switzerland. At least for these countries the institutionalized power positions are a plausible explanatory factor. In the history of the European countries decision about union incorporation have been taken – mostly in the 30 years from the beginning of WWI to the end of WWII – that gave unions much say in the economies and political system without making this dependent on membership mobilization (Armingeon 1994). Examples are the major industrial peace treaties that established unions as representatives of employees both in collective bargaining and in politics. The emergence of such union incorporation is closely linked to what has been described as co-ordinated market economies. (Hall and Soskice 2001)

Seen from that angle, such major institutional decisions have not been taken in the post-communist world. Union incorporation served mainly in creating legitimacy for government policies in the transition (Jankova 1998; Hassel 2005). It is very unlikely that such institutional decisions, which guarantee trade unions a role as legitimate representatives of the employees, will be taken. Hence the weakness of post-communist labor is due neither to a lack of resources, nor to a lacking labor agenda, nor to the lack of being a major organizational point for civil society. Rather it is the lack of an institutional order of the economy and the political system that establishes negotiation as the standard operating procedure for all the major economic and political actors.

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